

**Mayor's column for
The Beacon
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Several weeks ago I received an unsolicited offer from Snohomish County Fire District 1 to provide fire service to the city of Edmonds. They already provide service to the cities of Mountlake Terrace and Brier, and they also made similar offers to Lynnwood and Mukilteo.

Their offer consisted of a long-term contract to provide fire and medic service, and to purchase our fire stations and our equipment. If we agreed to this offer, all City-employed firefighters would become FD1 firefighters. We would continue to be served by the same firefighters, with the same equipment, from the same stations, with the same or better level of service. The only difference is that we would no longer, as a city, operate our own fire department.

I presented the offer sheet to the City Council and asked for their authorization to negotiate with FD1. The Council unanimously agreed. Those negotiations have been ongoing at two levels: management staff from the City and District have been meeting regularly to hammer out details of what would be acceptable to the City, and the respective labor unions have been meeting as well to look at the deal from labor's point of view.

I expect that we will have a report for Council from the management side within weeks. The City's fire union has been very active in discussions as well, and the union membership recently voted unanimously to continue discussions. They are optimistic that this concept will be a win-win for Edmonds residents and for the union.

I've read comments in the press recently that the City is "selling" the fire department. This is not an eBay transaction or an item on Craigslist! These are real-life negotiations that are designed to improve fire service to our residents, to slow the cost growth of providing this service, and to put the City on more solid financial ground. While there has been significant discussion by the City Council about sending a levy to the voters, the fire talks have been ongoing at the same time. This is not an either-or proposition. Should we strike a deal on fire service, we still will need to go to the voters to shore up the City's finances. But we may be able to put off the levy for another nine to 12 months until the economy has an opportunity to recover.

I have believed for a long time that the future of city services will eventually be regional in nature. Should we decide to contract for fire services, and if other cities climb onboard as well, we would be looking at a regional fire provider. That sounds very similar to another discussion group that has been meeting off and on for several months; that of a Regional Fire Authority. And indeed, contracting of service may at some point lead to the creation of an RFA.

If Edmonds can be a leader in the banning of plastic bags, we certainly should be the leader in the creation of the regionalization of city services. Combining services with other cities may be the only way that individual cities will survive in the future. More to come!